Human Excellence in Classical Athens

The greatest authors of classical Athens—Plato, Aristotle, Aristophanes, and Thucydides—hand down to us a fascinating set of works to reflect on human excellence. Their books are still alive to us today because they do not simply paint portraits of human excellence bound to a particular time and place, but they ask what human excellence looks like simply. To do so, they consider some of the most timeless and difficult philosophical questions about what it means to be excellent: Is the excellent citizen the same as the excellent human being? Is achieving human excellence synonymous with living a good life? Is human excellence the same for all people? Our class will turn to the original works of classical thinkers to explore the challenges of arriving at a view human excellence that can inspire us today. The course work has two main components: seminar style discussion of texts, and intensive writing work. Students will spend approximately one quarter of their time learning the skills to craft interesting, polished prose essays. Students can expect to prepare regular short written exercises, quizzes, a final exam, interpretive papers, casual presentations, and a term paper.